



U.S. Office of Personnel Management

October 26, 2001

Additional Questions and Answers on Potential Exposure to Anthrax

Q1: My agency has requested that I be tested for anthrax. Will I be granted excused absence for testing? Who will pay for testing and treatment?

A1: Agencies may excuse employees from work without loss of pay or charge to leave for testing and treatment if the employees have been identified as being at risk for exposure to anthrax or other hazardous agents.

Services to test for exposure to anthrax may be provided by the employing agency under 5 U.S.C. 7901. The Federal Employees' Compensation Act provides for medical treatment of an **actual** injury or occupational disease. However, if an employee not initially entitled to services to test for exposure to anthrax is identified later as having a "documented exposure" to anthrax or other hazardous agents, he or she will be reimbursed for tests and treatments by the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) or the agency. In addition, preventative care can be authorized by OWCP when there is probable exposure to a known contaminant requiring disease-specific measures against infection. You may obtain information on workers' compensation benefits at <http://www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/regs/compliance/owcp/INDEXofResources.htm>.

Q2: I am covered by a plan in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. Will it provide coverage for services related to anthrax exposure?

A2: OPM has provided guidance to all FEHB plans asking them to use maximum flexibility in determining health benefits coverage for these services. Health plans will provide coverage for any appropriate prescriptions, including prophylactic treatment, for anthrax. They also will authorize hospitalization for initial treatment and monitoring of patients deemed to be at risk. We expect that employees advised by their employing agencies to consult a local Public Health Service will have appropriate arrangements made for them. Since some may be referred to other treatment facilities or may go directly to emergency rooms for evaluation, any and all appropriate medical services will be covered by FEHB health plans.

Watch for information on the Office of Insurance Program's website, www.opm.gov/insure.

Q3: My agency does not believe I am at risk for anthrax exposure, but I am nervous and want to be tested. May I be granted excused absence?

A3: Each Federal agency is authorized to determine whether employees may be granted excused absence in this situation.

Q4: May an agency grant excused absence to an employee whose worksite is closed due to contamination by anthrax or other hazardous agents?

A4: Yes. If all or part of an installation is closed because of contamination by anthrax or other hazardous agents, an agency may grant excused absence to employees who are prevented from working because of contamination of their worksite. Agencies may require employees to report to an alternate worksite within the same commuting area or may allow employees to telework from a remote worksite, if appropriate.

Q5. May I use sick leave to take a family member for testing or treatment for potential exposure to anthrax?

A5. Yes. An employee may use his or her sick leave, annual leave, or leave without pay to provide care for a family member receiving a medical examination or treatment for potential exposure to anthrax. In addition, an employee may invoke his or her entitlement to unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) to care for a spouse, son or daughter, or parent who is being tested or treated for potential exposure to anthrax. (Employees may substitute annual leave or sick leave for leave without pay under the FMLA, within certain limitations.) Fact sheets on the Federal leave system are available on OPM's Web site at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/leave/HTML/factindx.HTM>.

Q6: Where can I find the latest information about the effects of exposure to anthrax?

Q6: The Centers for Disease Control has issued a document about "Anthrax Information and Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response," which can be found on its Web site at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov>.